



United States Department of the Interior



IN REPLY REFER TO:
1.A.2. (SER-PC)

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
Atlanta Federal Center
1924 Building
100 Alabama St., SW.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

OCT 20 2017

General Services Administration, Region 4
Attention: Mr. Ashish Desai
Martin Luther King Building
77 Forsyth Street
Atlanta, GA 30308

Dear Mr. Desai:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to the General Services Administration (GSA) on the environmental assessment (EA) for a proposed new U.S. courthouse in Anniston, Alabama.

The EA evaluates four alternatives in detail:

1. No action (do not build new courthouse);
2. Construct new courthouse on Block 148 (the current City Hall site);
3. Construct new courthouse on Block 149 (bounded by Gurnee Avenue, 11th Street, Moore Avenue, and 10th Street); and
4. Construct new courthouse on Block 151/159 (bounded by 14th Street, Moore Avenue, 13th Street, and Grove Street).

No preferred alternative was identified in the EA. Based on the impact analysis in the EA, and for the additional reasons set forth below, the National Park Service (NPS) supports Alternative 4, the Block 151/159 site, as its preferred location for the proposed new courthouse. We have significant concerns about Alternatives 2 and 3 as proposed sites, and the potential for adverse impacts to the nearby Freedom Riders National Monument (Monument). We are particularly concerned with Alternative 3, the Block 149 site.

The recently established Monument is located in downtown Anniston and includes the site of the former Greyhound bus terminal at 1031 Gurnee Avenue. It was at this site in May 1961 that a bus carrying an interracial group of Freedom Riders was violently attacked by a mob seeking to maintain segregation by force. The former bus terminal building is located directly across the street from the proposed courthouse location under consideration in Alternative 3.

Block 149 still retains much of its historic character from the time period of the Freedom Rides, and as such, contributes materially to the historic integrity of the new Monument and the

aesthetic experience of those visiting the Monument. Razing the old structures in this location and constructing a new courthouse as described in Alternative 3 would destroy the historic character of the neighborhood surrounding the Monument and significantly degrade the sense of time and place that visitors would experience. Accordingly, the NPS has significant concerns about the potential adverse effects to the Monument from construction of a new Federal courthouse within Block 149 and cannot support Alternative 3.

The NPS also has significant concerns about the potential for adverse visual impacts to the historic character and visitor experience at the Monument from Alternative 2 (Block 148), due to the proximity of Block 148 to the Monument, and that the new courthouse would likely be larger than the two historic buildings it replaces. Alternative 2 is preferable to Alternative 3; however, significant siting and design measures would likely be required to mitigate these adverse visual impacts. The NPS cannot support this alternative absent additional consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to discuss specific mitigation measures.

Alternative 4 (Block 151/159) would have the least impact on the Monument due to its distance from the former bus terminal and Block 149. Alternative 4 would also have the fewest adverse impacts to contributing structures in the broader Downtown Anniston Historic District. While the alternative calls for the demolition of three contributing buildings, most of the resources on the Block 151/159 site have undergone alteration and their integrity has been compromised. For these reasons, the NPS supports the selection of Alternative 4 as the preferred location for the new courthouse.

The EA is well-prepared, and we do not have any specific comments on the document itself. Regardless of which alternative location is selected, it is recommended that the courthouse be designed in scale, size and with materials that are compatible with the Monument as well as the surrounding architecture of the historic structures of the Downtown Anniston Historic District. Visual issues must be addressed during the courthouse design to minimize impacts.

Please feel free to contact Superintendent Reginald Tiller at Reggie_Tiller@nps.gov or 404-960-9067 for additional information.

Sincerely,

(b) (6)

For Stan Austin
Regional Director
Southeast Region